



Athlete Profile (Local)

Mariette Firecloud – Hometown Rookie Expects to do Well

Mariette Firecloud will compete in her first National Veterans Wheelchair Games in Milwaukee this June. A 49-year-old U.S. military veteran, Firecloud served in the Army from 1978-1983. Two years later, she was injured in a devastating car accident that injured her spinal cord and left her a quadriplegic.

During her military service, Firecloud was a cook for three years at the 8th Infantry Battalion in Bad Kreuznach, Germany. At the time of her accident in 1985, she was working as a kitchen supervisor for the Bureau of Indian Affairs in Mission, South Dakota. When she was first injured, she was medivaced to a Minneapolis hospital for her initial treatment, and was later transferred to VA's spinal cord injury unit in Milwaukee for continuing rehabilitation. Firecloud calls it, "The best spinal cord injury unit in the United States." Proving her belief in that point, she has chosen to remain in the Milwaukee area to access that care for the past 20 years.

Despite the limitations caused by her injury, Firecloud lives alone and functions quite independently. Her left arm and hand have some movement, which helps improve her self sufficiency and her mobility. Although she does have caregivers who come to her apartment and provide some of the routine assistance she needs, Firecloud is otherwise on her own. Automatic door openers and a motorized wheelchair help improve her ability to be out an about. She lives in South Milwaukee and enjoys exploring the area. "You'll often see me out cruising around the streets," Firecloud said. "I live a few blocks from the Lake Michigan beach and we have a great system of bike trails that are perfect for me to use."

When she's not out traveling around the Milwaukee area, Firecloud remains busy inside exploring the Internet. She enjoys helping friends and family with computer research – as well as the occasional dog-sitting assignment.

A novice wheelchair athlete, this is Firecloud's first encounter with the National Veterans Wheelchair Games. While she was encouraged to compete by her recreation therapist at the Milwaukee VA Medical Center, Firecloud agrees that it made sense to participate this year since the event is taking place so close to home. At the Games in June, she will try her hand in bowling, the motorized wheelchair slalom and power soccer. "I don't know what to expect from the Games until I live through them," she admitted. Being one to always enjoy new experiences though, Mariette Firecloud is sure to appreciate the competition as well as the camaraderie this event always seems to inspire.